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FOR WHA/CAN AND INR/B

APP WINNIPEG MSG 2005/03

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SUBJECT: BIO -- GARY FILMON

1. (U) Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin recently named Gary Filmon as Chairman of the country's Security Intelligence Review Committee (SIRC), which oversees the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. Filmon had served on the committee for about four years before his appointment as chairman. APP Winnipeg offers this short bio of Filmon.

2 (SBU) Filmon was Manitoba's last Progressive Conservative premier, serving from 1988-99. He remains quite well respected locally despite engaging in some pretty tough cost-cutting in the early to mid 90's and the privatization of the provincially-owned phone company. His signature achievement was balancing Manitoba's budget in 1995 and bringing in Balanced Budget legislation that was touted as the toughest of its kind at the time. It has since become the "holy grail" of Manitoba politics. After initially bucking it, the NDP in 1999 accepted the legislation and has not touched it since being elected (although they've found a few loopholes in the legislation that give them some flexibility). Filmon remains synonymous here with competent fiscal management and is generally governed as a moderate conservative on social issues.

3. (SBU) Although his reputation remains strong, there is a consensus that he stayed on as Premier a couple of years beyond his "best before date". In the late 90s, his government's reputation was touched by scandal when his chief of staff was found to be complicit in the "vote-rigging" scandal in the 1995 election. Essentially the Tories bankrolled four or five aboriginal candidates in swing ridings, in the hope that these candidates would siphon off enough NDP votes to let the Tories come up the middle and win (it didn't work). Filmon was not implicated in the maneuver, but it tarnished what had been a squeaky-clean reputation and added to Manitoban's fatigue with his regime that led to the PCs defeat him in the 1999 election. Since retiring as leader of the PCs in 2000, he has been nearly invisible from politics, except to engage a bit in the federal Conservative Party leadership (for Stronach), and recently to chastise her for crossing the floor. The BC Government commissioned him to write a report a couple of years ago on the forest fire disaster.

4. (SBU) Filmon is a straight-shooter. Interlocutors will find him sensitive to U.S. interests and very serious about Canada's national security. If he chairs SIRC anything like how he ran the GOM, expect a low-key, workman-like atmosphere with an absence of histrionics and hyperbole (think the opposite of Carolyn Parrish). Filmon can be expected to consult quite widely to access the best advice from a wide range of views, and take his responsibilities very seriously. We expect he would welcome appropriate overtures from the USG. Filmon has the reputation of being a consensus builder and is not particularly partisan. Don't expect him to do anything to publicly embarrass the Liberals who appointed him, but neither will he whitewash a problem he has identified. Any criticisms he offers will be done constructively and to improve the system, rather than to target specific individuals.

5. (U) APP WINNIPEG SENDS.

DICKSON